

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF MARYLOU FOLEY
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**HEARING ON THE NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES ACT
held by the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE, AND OCEANS**

JUNE 18, 2008

Chairwoman Bordallo, ranking member Brown, I would like to thank you and the other Members of the committee for holding this hearing to discuss an important piece of legislation—the National Marine Sanctuaries Act.

I come before you today as a longtime resident of Hawaii, which is home to the Hawaii Islands Humpback Whale Sanctuary and Papapahanaumokuakea National Monument and representing Outrigger Hotels & Resorts, a division of Outrigger Enterprises.

Outrigger Enterprises Group is one of the largest and fastest growing privately-held leisure lodging and hospitality companies in the Asia Pacific and Oceania regions. A family-owned company with more than 60 years of hospitality experience, Outrigger runs a highly-successful, multi-branded line of hotels, condominiums and vacation resort properties. Currently, Outrigger operates and/or has under development 47 properties with close to 12,000 rooms located in Hawaii, Australia, Guam, Fiji, Palau, Bali and Phuket, Thailand.

Outrigger Enterprises Group also operates and develops hotel properties and hospitality-related retail and real estate opportunities for partners in Hawaii, the Pacific, the mainland USA and Asia.

I have been involved in the Hawaii's visitor industry for more than 30 years including oversight responsibility for Outrigger's expansion into the Marshall Islands, Palau, Tahiti, Guam and Fiji and presently responsible for community outreach, programs and public relations for the beachfront properties in Waikiki and on the Big Island of Hawaii.

With extensive travel in the Pacific including the Cook Islands, Samoa, Tahiti, Marquesas, throughout Micronesia and to smaller islands and atolls with the tallest land mass at six feet where you can see both the ocean on the right and the lagoon on the left, we understand a country's total dependence on the ocean and the impact of our fragile eco-system. Young leaders in the Marshall Islands know that their country may be underwater within 40 years and Palau has lost up to one-third of their coral to global warming.

Based on these first hand Island experiences and seeing how fragile ocean ecosystems are, working with the National Marine Sanctuaries was very important. In May 2007,

Outrigger Hotels entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the National Marine Sanctuaries, a system of thirteen national marine sanctuaries and one marine national monument in Hawaii.

In Hawaii, we are home to the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary which protects a significant and unique environment for endangered humpback whales. As many as 10,000, an estimated one half of the North Pacific population of humpback whales, migrate to Hawaii each year during the months of November through May to mate and calve. Our marine national monument, Papahānaumokuākea, was established in June 2006 in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and provides protection to approximately 140,000 square miles of area.

Our Memorandum of Agreement with National Marine Sanctuaries is a broad, collaborative framework for education and public outreach for the conservation of marine animals, plant species and ocean habitats. This is the first partnership of its kind between NOAA/National Marine Sanctuaries and a hotel company. Voluntarily, we seek opportunities to work together to support the conservation and education needs of the American public as prescribed in NOAA's authority.

Hawaii stretches from NOAA/NMS national monument Papahānaumokuākea the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands to Kauai, Oahu, Maui and the ever growing Big Island of Hawaii. We boast a population of 1.2 million residents. Hawaii is traditionally referred to as a sun, sand and sea destination. Tourism is our number one industry.

In 2006 we welcomed more than 7.4 million visitors, with 3.1 million from the US west coast, the majority from California. Tourism represents close to \$12 billion dollars in revenue to the state, followed only by military spending at \$6.8 billion. \$500 million dollars is the estimated value of reported ocean recreation activities for those that actively dive, surf, ride catamarans, not to forget the visitors who just come to enjoy the beauty of the sand and sea. The allure of a healthy ocean and Waikiki Beach is critical to our state's economy.

The challenges to coastal communities are many, including non-biodegradable trash, aging or limited infrastructure that dumps raw sewage into the ocean and climate changes, global warming and rising waters that threaten low-lying atolls and beachfront areas.

However, we firmly believe that we can meet some of these challenges with increased and ongoing education of ocean initiatives, strategic alliances with those committed to sustainability: NOAA, Ocean Futures, Nature Conservancy, local universities- research and academic communities to help disseminate substantive information and through active involvement.

Our Memorandum of Agreement with the National Marine Sanctuaries in Hawaii has provided us critical content for programs that we offer to our visitors and residents. A few of our recent projects include:

- Dissemination of information and photo exhibit of Northwest Hawaiian Islands by internationally renowned photographer Susan Middleton
- Community presentations at the hotel about whales, honu (turtles) and marine mammals
- Teacher training workshops about the Ocean
- Collaboration with Girl Scouts' of the Pacific and creation of a Reef Teach badge
- Assisting with NOAA's 200th Anniversary at both a media event and a public celebration with more than 5,000 in attendance.
- Partnering with our local newspaper on our Kai Ola (Ocean Alive) Poetry contest, more than 900 students entered.
- Media briefings with NOAA for Pacific Island journalists
- Informational whale kiosk and ongoing ocean related videos at our hotels
- Work with Jean Michel Cousteau on his voyage to Kure and educational presentation at the hotels
- Weekly television reports and community programs while NOAA's research vessel works at Papahānaumokuākea.
- Most recently working with Hawaii's NBC affiliate-KHNL and NOAA, we helped to create an Earth & Sea television educational campaign which has generated more than \$75,000 advertising equivalent exposure since February of this year

Outrigger has a long-standing commitment to preserving and celebrating what makes Hawaii special. We are committed to promote better public knowledge about our ocean environment, enhance the quality of our guests' experiences and support our greater island environment. Away from their daily routine, we have found that visitors are more receptive to learning about the ocean and environment.

We bring to NOAA/NMS our area of expertise of hospitality, a broad based community outreach, media contacts and easy access to help educate the residents and visitors about resource protection. NMS provides support of content, access to researchers and assistance from their staff, whenever possible. This collaboration has proved to be successful and this type of private sector collaboration for public dissemination of information can be expanded throughout throughout the Sanctuaries system.

More can be done in Hawaii and nationally to fulfill the National Marine Sanctuaries objective of “enhancing public awareness, understanding and stewardship towards the marine environment.” However, NMS’s mandate is large and project resources thin. Research, rescue and response capabilities of the Sanctuary come first and others will address funds necessary for enforcement staff and vessels, scientific research and monitoring and the need for partnerships with private, local, regional, federal, tribal and native organizations.

The Sanctuaries need adequate funding to carry out its mandates to educate the public and protect these places. Funding for educational programs and facilities including visitor centers, signage, public service campaigns is critical. The ocean is not a renewable resource.

To our Hawaiian kupuna, or ancestors, and to all explorers, the ocean was the highway that connected us all. To Islanders the ocean is not only our highway, but our farms, foodsource and livelihood. Based on Outrigger’s values of kuleana (responsibility) and a’o (to learn and to share), we will continue to be involved and help to educate our community and visitors, about the importance of a healthy ocean. We share the ocean, it connects us all.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity to testify before you today, in support of a strong National Marine Sanctuaries Act. Reauthorization of this legislation will allow for the continued and enhanced protection of the National Marine Sanctuaries, and by extension, our oceans.